

News release

SQE2 on course to be a reliable, valid and cost-effective assessment

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Results of the Solicitors Qualifying Examination 2 (SQE2) pilot, along with analysis and recommendations, have been published by Kaplan.

The SQE is a new, single assessment for qualifying solicitors. Subject to final approval from the Legal Services Board, it is due to be introduced in autumn 2021.

The SQE2 assessment focuses on practical legal skills and involves both oral and written tasks. It tests legal research, legal writing, legal drafting, case and matter analysis, advocacy, client interviewing and attendance note/legal analysis. It requires both competent client handling and communication skills and the ability to apply legal knowledge accurately.

Before taking SQE2, candidates would need to pass SQE1, which focuses on functioning legal knowledge. The results of the SQE1 pilot were published in July last year.

The SQE2 pilot took place in December 2019 and involved 190 participants. Twenty three of these did not sit the full pilot resulting in 167 full participants.

The [pilot findings](https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/sra/policy/solicitors-qualifying-examination/pilot/sqe-pilots/sqe2-pilot/sra-response-sqe2-pilot/) [https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/sra/policy/solicitors-qualifying-examination/pilot/sqe-pilots/sqe2-pilot/sra-response-sqe2-pilot/] have been published by Kaplan, the assessment provider for the SQE. Kaplan reports that through the types of assessment tasks tested it is possible to design an assessment of practical legal skills that is valid, reliable, manageable and cost effective.

The operational aspects of the pilot also went well. The SQE Independent Reviewer has confirmed that the planning, operation and analyses of the pilot were generally of a high or very high quality.

Feedback from pilot candidates who responded to a survey was positive. 87% of candidates responded either positively (80% strongly agreed/ agreed) or neutrally (7%) that the legal skills questions were clear, and 84% responded positively (67% strongly agreed / agreed) or neutrally (17%) that the legal skills questions reflected problems that might be encountered by a day-one solicitor.

Some candidates thought greater clarity on the standard or level expected would be helped by the provision of sample questions and

answers. We plan to publish sample questions and answers for SQE2 later this year.

Kaplan makes two core recommendations from the pilot. They are that the SQE2:

- should be a uniform examination in which all candidates take the same assessment. Kaplan report that the optional models explored in the pilot did not give sufficient confidence that all candidates would be assessed against a single universal standard at admission
- should take the form of a single examination consisting of between 15 to 18 tasks (or "stations"). This would achieve the high standard of reliability and precision necessary to ensure that "those who pass deserve to pass, and those who fail deserve to fail."

These recommendations were supported by the SQE's Independent Reviewer.

We are considering these recommendations alongside other evidence from an 18-month period of engagement, testing and development, involving expert input and independent review. This includes considering nine years of data from the Qualified Lawyers Transfer Scheme (QLTS). This data involves a total of more than 16,000 candidate attempts spread across multiple choice and legal skills assessments.

Julie Brannan, Director of Education and Training said: "A significant problem with the current system is that there are more than 100 organisations setting and marking exams. It is hard to have full confidence that all qualifying solicitors are meeting a consistent, high standard. A centralised, independent assessment will tackle this problem.

We need to make sure we get the detail of the design right. These pilots, alongside a whole range of engagement and expert input, will help us make sure the SQE is a rigorous, fair assessment. We will announce our final decision on the SQE design shortly."

Peter Houillon, CEO of Kaplan Professional UK and Ireland said: "An exam leading to qualification as a solicitor must meet the very highest quality standards to both protect the public and be fair to candidates. The pilot gives us the necessary data, alongside information from other sources, to make recommendations to ensure the SQE will meet those standards."